

STATE CHILD DEATH REVIEW BOARD



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STATE CHILD DEATH REVIEW BOARD URGES AWARENESS OF TEENAGE DRINKING & DRIVING DURING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION CEREMONIES

You can almost feel the anticipation and excitement in the air as young people all across the state prepare to officially become high school graduates. This is meant to be a time of joy and celebration of this proud achievement, however, each year it sadly turns into a time of tragedy for far too many families across our state and the country. Unfortunately, graduation ceremonies are often an excuse for drinking by students, which can lead to dangerous and deadly consequences.

According to the Kansas Department of Transportation, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for young people from 15 to 18 years old. In 2004 alone, there were 5,993 teen drivers injured in auto accidents of which 51 were killed. Alcohol use contributed to 279 of these crashed resulting in 8 deaths and 213 injuries. This does not include those teens that had their lives permanently changed due to a disabling injury.

There are many things that parents, schools and communities can do to keep students safe during these happy times. A popular idea is to organize an alternative, all-night, alcohol-free party after graduation. This should be a joint effort between parents, schools, businesses, and student leaders to gain their support. Have a variety of activities that the students can participate in. Find local businesses that will supply prizes for drawings at the event. In the end, students will have fun and they will be safe from tragedies that stem from underage drinking.

Far too often, graduating teens are supplied alcohol by their own parents or other adults. Be aware of your teen's plans for celebrating graduation and where the celebration is going to take place. This should be a happy and joyous time for high school graduates and their families. Don't let alcohol and driving turn it into tragedy.

The SCDRB is a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency board that examines the circumstances surrounding the deaths of all Kansas children (birth through 17 years of age) and children who are not Kansas residents, but who die in the state. The goals of the SCDRB are to describe the trends and patterns of child deaths in Kansas, to develop prevention strategies, and to improve sources of data and communication among agencies so that recommendations can be made. For additional information visit the SCDRB website at <http://www.ksag.org/Divisions/SCDRB/cdrb.htm> or contact Wayne Stith, Executive Director, at (785) 296-2215.